

INSECT ARK

Dana Schechter (*Swans*) pairs up with powerhouse drummer Andy Patterson (ex-*SubRosa*) as INSECT ARK deliver their most harrowing and punishing record yet.

Instrumental psychedelic doom duo **Insect Ark** have been creating uncomfortable soundscapes that feel both intimate and icy cold since 2011. Nightmarish horror film-like visions, outer space travel, and gritty noir textures — all of this and more have been conjured up in their past records, the much-praised **Portal / Well** (2015) and **Marrow Hymns** (2018), but now, something even bigger is coming. Prepare for **The Vanishing**.

“The album’s title refers to a daydream I had of disappearing completely — floating out to sea alone, never to return, or walking off down a road, and never being found. This idea has recurred throughout my life,” says Dana Schechter, NYC-based multi-instrumentalist, known for her collaborations with **Swans** (for whom she is now part of the main touring line-up), **Angels Of Light**, **Gnaw**, **Zeal & Ardor**, **Wrekmaster Harmonies** or **Årabrot**, among others, her own projects **Bee and Flower** and **Gifhorse**, and also, naturally, for her current main personal vehicle of expression, Insect Ark. Describing the ideas and feelings behind Insect Ark’s new album, *The Vanishing*, she continues: “On a much bigger level, it’s about the impermanence of life itself, trying to retain perspective of how small we really are, invisible in the bigger frame of time and history. We all will face this impermanence, even if we try to hide from it. The endless cycle of birth/death exists for all life forms, yet sometimes we forget we’re not immortal.”



Photo: Chad Kelco

As you might have predicted from that emotional setting, *The Vanishing* is not a work for the faint of heart. Unlike a lot of instrumental music, and even like some of Insect Ark’s previous work, it does not really creep on you from the background, and it’s so much more than just a piece of ambient music to serve as a companion to other tasks. Though many parts of it veer off into mind-expanding outer realms territories, the interplay between the bass, lap steel guitar, synths and drums is tighter and closer to song format than ever before, and that’s essentially what *The Vanishing* really represents — it is a strong and defiant collection of songs that demand your exclusive attention forcefully, straight from the beginning. Take opener *Tectonic* as a perfect example — kicking off the album with a rumbling, cavernous bass line, it soon expands into a devastating, gigantic Neurosis-like movement worthy of its title. It’s heavier, darker and denser than anything Insect Ark have ever done, yet without losing any of the writing characteristics that have become synonymous with their personality, like the persistent coating of eerie psychedelia, the alien feel of the melodies or the ominous dread they often exhale.

In many ways, this record feels like both an arrival and a departure for the duo. Dana is now joined by former **SubRosa** drummer **Andy Patterson** and this partnership appears to have completely nailed the true essence of Insect Ark throughout these six songs, despite the recent nature of the pairing. After parting ways with former drummer **Ashley Spungin**, Schechter was left with a somewhat uncertain near future — an US tour with Oranssi Pazuza booked and recording sessions approaching quickly for the new album of which there were still only raw versions of songs. “I didn’t have a plan B,” Dana recalls of that period a few months ago when she found herself as the only member of Insect Ark again, a scenario that was in fact the way the project started, but given the direction it has taken since then, now requires a special kind of drummer to fully flesh out its potential. “I wasn’t going to give the tour or the recording up. I can work with a challenge, but I knew finding the right person was a tall order, and the amount of work that laid ahead was daunting considering the tight schedule.” Serendipity then struck, and a mutual friend suggested Patterson, who was himself looking



INSECT ARK

for a new challenge after the end of SubRosa. “Andy was really enthusiastic,” Dana says. “I sent him a song, he sent it back with some drum ideas, then he came to NYC for a tryout. I knew he was a great drummer, not only from SubRosa but his other bands **DØNE** and **The Otolith**, but I needed to be sure the chemistry was there. The work ethic also had to be there. These were both crucial, because to pull it off, we’d have to pack into a few weeks what would take most bands half a year. I flew to Salt Lake City before tour and we went into overdrive. We practiced seven days a week for three weeks. The songs all were brand new, so it was a full restart for us both.” In the end, they emerged with the best possible scenario that could be expected for this new collaboration – a tremendous new album for the present, and a partnership to further explore in the future, both in studio and on stage. “His drumming was excellent as expected, but he also really showed up for all the little pieces,” Dana describes excitedly. “Insect Ark has a complex technical setup, and being a duo, there’s a lot of detail work happening under the hood that nobody on the outside ever sees or hears. He’s got a sense of grace which makes him a real joy to work with. It was intense but I enjoyed every minute of it, and can’t wait to get back on the road together.”

The intensity and the dedication poured into the songs is clearly audible, not to mention the wizardry of engineer **Colin Marston**, a perfect choice if there ever was any to capture a work of this nature. The distinction from Insect Ark’s past works is also very noticeable. The band, along with Colin, intentionally steered the sound in a much more visceral, organic direction, and sometimes you can almost feel enclosed within a living, pulsating, slithering organism as the music washes over you. The ebb and flow of the songs as they bleed into each other is so natural that you’d be forgiven for thinking Dana and Andy tinkered with each of them for months on end after listening to *The Vanishing*, because they all feel like clearly defined enclosed universes all of their own. That crushing weight of *Tectonic* is followed by *Three Gates*, a jarring, almost disorienting clash of dissonance and groove where the lap steel plays a fundamental role, and that segues straight into the otherworldly duo of *Philae* and *Danube*, the album’s ethereal, sinister centerpieces, and the ones that most clearly exemplify the tight dynamics set in place by the masterful songwriting. The album’s most dreamy songs, their cloudy lapsteel magic is nevertheless constantly and consistently underpinned by Patterson’s swirling and earthy drum patterns, sounding for all the world as if the two recently acquainted musicians become a tight-knit army when these songs are flowing out of them. The album artwork, an amazing painting by French artist **Sonia Merah**, is in and of itself a work of art, but when paired with these two songs in particular, it becomes a truly haunting and mesmerising vision of some terribly twisted alternate reality. The album is then rounded out by the synth-heavy *Swollen Sun*, a trippy four minute journey that feels like a foray into the insides of an abandoned spaceship drifting somewhere in outer space, and by the haunted rollercoaster that is the closing title-track, a sort of summing up of all the many components that make *The Vanishing* so unique-sounding.

“Making music takes a lot out of me,” Dana says, and it’s hard not to understand why after listening to this tour de force that is Insect Ark’s new album. “To pull it out of my heart and put it into the world can be emotionally difficult, since it comes from a complex place with so many facets like pain, belief, hope, anger, joy.”

The Vanishing came out February 28, 2020 on Profound Lore Records.

TRACK LISTING:

- 1) **Tectonic**
- 2) **Three Gates**
- 3) **Philae**
- 4) **Danube**
- 5) **Swollen Sun**
- 6) **The Vanishing**

DISCOGRAPHY:

- 2020: *The Vanishing*, LP/CD, Profound Lore Records
- 2018: *Marrow Hymns*, LP/CD, Profound Lore Records
- 2017: *Portal/Well*, Ltd Edition LP, Sleeping Giant Glossolalia Records
- 2016: *Long Arms/Maria W. Horn* split, Cassette, XKatedral Records
- 2015: *Portal/Well*, CD, Autumnsongs Records
- 2015: *Windless*, 7" Lathe Cut Single, Utech Records
- 2013: *Long Arms*, 10" EP, Geweih Ritual Documents
- 2012: *Collapsar*, 7" Single, Lancashire & Somerset Records

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Photo: Chris Carlone

Press Reviews for THE VANISHING

Pop Matters - March 2020

Schechter's return now with *The Vanishing* finds Insect Ark at its most potent. With drummer Andy Patterson (ex-SubRosa) joining on this venture, the duo performs a sickening descent to a hallucinogenic abyss... desolate, crafting obscure desert-like sceneries with sparse lead work, or horrifying moments of ambient dread that slithers and moves in circular motifs. *The Vanishing* drives this message straight to the heart, with its fantastic bends that stretch reality itself.

Invisible Oranges - Feb 2020

Music for your brain. *The Vanishing* is doom-trodden and angular and creepy and mystical in all the right ways. I'm calling it "horror" metal not because it would work well as a horror movie soundtrack (it just might), but because it really instills that anxious discomfort which, counterintuitively, translates into an enjoyable but tense listen.

Meat Mead Metal - Feb 2020

Hulks through the galaxy like a beam, decimating the surface as your mind is lost in a dream. Lasers form and cut through the playing as the pace hovers, and the Western skies again hang over the song. Slide guitars darken the track while strange waves create frightful confusion, and that ominously slithers toward heavy chunking, while everything becomes a combined force that bleeds into the sun.

The Obelisk - March 2020

Even the cymbal washes that populate the open spaces of the 10-minute closing title-track are meant to be forward in their impact; they're leading the way gradually & patiently through a noise-laden drone-out and back to a more cohesive post-metallic progression that builds to the final apex of the record. *The Vanishing* only pushes farther toward that last crescendo in the title-track — which, yes, ends cold enough to be vanishing suddenly; the abiding darkness of the atmosphere is unrelenting.

Zero Tolerance #95 - April 2020

The great highlight of Insect Ark's present moment is this beast of a record. *The Vanishing* can be roughly described as a sort of more psychedelic. instrumental Neurosis, a comparison which is not made lightly. It feels like something that has to have been born out of great soul-searching. "I am inspired to create music that makes people have an emotional reaction," Dana says thoughtfully. "I wish to offer sound as transport, as salve, as comfort to tortured souls."

Heavy Blog Is Heavy - Feb 2020

The Vanishing feels cavernous, making you feel small and on edge; it's very easy to disappear into it. Different flashes of unsettling moments and uncomfortable feelings slink through your mind. There's a disconcerting violence to much of the music that touches you deeply. It's quite rare and incredible.

New Noise Magazine - Feb 2020

"They've basically dissolved into the ether, their spirit. It's kind of more about that than the literal thing of the ocean, but it's something that's been in me for my whole life. This feeling that you just can't forget that we're here right now, and this is really a struggle for all of us to recognize because life is short, but it's also long, and it's easy to forget. We're not immortal, and we tend to forget that."

Selective Memory - March 2020

This soundtrack-like exodus is beautiful and sad all in the same breath. It breathes in life and spits out a dissonance. The beauty of *The Vanishing* is that these songs do not simply run on numbing downtuned structures and drenched instrumental sludge. There is an exceptional artistry to the careful

Metal Sucks - March 2020

Insect Ark's *The Vanishing* is the darkest, most unsettling metal record I've heard this year - with jarring, unsettling sound effects and atmospherics that constantly jostle the senses, preventing the listening experience from ever settling down into a sense of stasis. Insect Ark are at once a sum of their parts and something entirely different, which is one of the highest compliments I can ever pay a band, and Colin Marston's characteristically clear but raw production ensures all of that is right at the forefront.